

SERIOUS
CONSIDERATIONS

ADDRESSED TO

GLASSITES,

AND OTHER

CONGREGATIONAL SEPARATISTS

FROM THE

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

EDINBURGH:

SOLD BY J. OGLE, PARLIAMENT-SQUARE,

1796.



THE following pages are extracted from a Letter written by a Lady in England. It was not written, as will at once be perceived, with any view of being printed. The person who received it, thought it, however, as well worth the attention of others as his own. And he hopes, that such who hold, as sacred, the principles and practices to which it alludes, will be pleased to consider it seriously. The inconsistency of the practice of some persons with their professed principles, is abundantly obvious to every one, but not perhaps to themselves. And the influence of human authority over the religion of those who most indignantly disclaim its influence, is sufficiently conspicuous to all who have had proper opportunities of observing its operation. But there is reason to think, that many deceive themselves upon this head; and account that they walk at liberty, because it is the authority of the Church, not of those they call the World, to which they are subject. Perhaps, the plain

recital of a conversation which actually took place, may be of use to awaken their attention, and to open their eyes. If these are turned to the Scriptures, and they should be taught to read, and to judge of them for themselves, rejecting as doctrines of God the commandments of men, this small publication will be of good effect.

*Edinburgh, March 25,
1796.*

*Extract of a LETTER from a Lady in
England.*

* * * * I CANNOT better explain my meaning, than by relating a conversation which I had this afternoon with my grocer, Mr. —, who, I have not the least doubt, is a sincere Christian. It is very possible for Christians to misunderstand the laws of Christ, especially if they do not keep clear of party-prejudice. Were I to find any fault with Mr. —, it would be for being too positive, and rather too much prejudiced in favour of his own judgment. A claim to infallibility, or any very near approaches to it, come with a bad grace from Protestants, none of whom has a right to call himself the true interpreter of the laws of Christ, imperfection being written upon every person and every thing here below.

In the course of the conversation, I happened to mention Mr. * * * *, the

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(a) Baptist minister. Mr. — immediately interrupted me, by observing, that the rejection of infant-baptism proceeded from a disbelief of that perfect atonement, which saves us in the same manner as it saves our infants. These people, continued he, suppose, that salvation is owing to something beside the thing signified in baptism, and that some condition is to be performed by us, which infants are unable to perform, notwithstanding our Lord has expressly declared, that we must enter his kingdom just as infants enter it. *See note (a)*

Ought we not rather, Sir, replied I, to take it for granted, if we will not give ourselves the trouble to inquire into their opinion on that subject, that our brethren the Baptists are inconsistent with themselves? It would be kinder to do so, than to charge them with denying the atonement of Christ, merely because they do not baptize their infants. Perhaps, Mr. —, if a Baptist were here, he might retort the charge, and tell you, that the baptizing of infants was virtually denying the doctrine of the atone-
ment,

(a) How can a member of the Church of Scotland reconcile the view a perfect atonement with their belief that there are infants from a span long in Hell?

ment, since it might be inferred, that you esteemed something else to be necessary to their salvation; and something, too, for which you had neither precept nor example *true* in the word of God. Thus might you reproach and accuse each other, without charity, without truth, without edification, and without end.

Charity, Madam! said he; I confess I am no great admirer of that Antinomian charity, which takes it for granted that all are Christians who can talk about illuminations, imputed righteousness, and the other great truths of the gospel, at the same time that they manifest their disbelief of them, by paying no regard to many of the injunctions of our Lord and his apostles. Every society united by this false charity, is a branch of that grand Antichristian apostasy, or opposition to Christ in the name of Christ, which was to take place in the world. Those who are truly of God, hear God's word. X.

But you do not take, Sir, replied I, the little society to which you belong, to be the only church of Christ, considering all others as Antichristian?

Indeed,

yes, and obey his will.

Indeed, Madam, I do, answered he. No society upon earth will bear to be measured by the word of God, except the church of which I am a member, and the churches in connection with us. Yet I have no doubt that there are many Christians beside those in fellowship with us; but the voice of God to them is, Come out from among them, and be ye separate.

You suppose then, said I, that all the members of your society are real Christians?

No, Madam, replied he, I do not.

Then I find, Sir, that in your church, as well as in others, there are both good and bad?

Be it so, Madam, answered he. But then we profess an entire subjection to Christ; and whenever it appears that any one does not yield an unreserved submission to all his precepts, we put away the unclean from amongst us. Like the church of Ephesus, we cannot bear those who are evil; who say that they are Jews, and are not; but who manifest by their works that they are of the synagogue of Satan.

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I commend every society of Christians, said I, for carefully watching over the conduct of its members. I am also ready to acknowledge, that Protestant Dissenters, in general, have been remiss in this particular duty. They have too much endeavoured to acquire large, and, as they are falsely called, flourishing congregations; and have too often neglected to purge out the old leaven, except for notorious evils. But is it not possible to run into the contrary extreme, and to pluck up the wheat together with the tares? Your society, Sir, will not be able, any more than others, to keep out those from its communion, who have the address to imitate both the faith and practice of Christians, as long as that imitation is attended with honour and interest. Many followed the Redeemer when he was here upon earth, not because they saw his miracles, but because they had eaten of the loaves; and he has had such followers in all ages.

True, Madam, replied he; but Protestant Dissenters, in general, do not so much as
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profess to be obedient to all the laws of Christ; it is no wonder, therefore, if their obedience be very deficient. No sin ought to be esteemed little, nor any of the commands of Christ of small importance. When do your ministers press upon their hearers an abstinence from blood? When do they enforce the kiss of charity? Or when do they exhort the friends of Jesus to follow his example, by washing each other's feet? Do they ever so much as mention it to be the duty of Christians to lay up treasure in heaven, in opposition to laying it up on earth, which our Lord has called by the name of covetousness? If a minister of the gospel were to tell a company of modern professors, that it is covetousness to lay up treasure on earth, and that the covetous are amongst those who will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven, they would deride him, as the Pharisees, who were covetous, derided Christ.

I perceive, Sir, said I, that you insist upon our receiving the commands of Christ in their most literal sense. And if that be the sense

fense in which they were intended to be understood, you are certainly right ; but that remains to be proved. From blood I myself abstain, as do many with whom I am acquainted. It was always esteemed a sacred thing, as well before the institution of the law of Moses as since its abolition. The kiss of charity I consider as a mode of salutation common to the time and place in which it was enjoined. Laying hold of each other's hand is the manner of salutation in this country ; and as much love may be expressed in that mode as in any other ; not that I am disposed to find fault with those who are otherwise minded. I am likewise a stranger to the precise manner in which the first Christians saluted each other, as I believe, Sir, you are too. I confess I have never washed any one's feet ; but I have been ready to do the servants of Christ the meanest offices ; and I assure Mr. —, that whenever washing his feet will be of any benefit to him, or whenever it shall be in my power to render him any other service, I shall not be backward. When sandals

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were worn, to assist any one in washing his feet was a friendly office. In every country, it is requisite that Christians should be humble, and that they should condescend to alleviate the distresses of their brethren as much as they can. They who act otherwise, manifest themselves to be strangers to the spirit and temper of Christ, who condescended to wash the feet of his disciples, not that he might teach them the observation of a ceremony, but that they might follow his example in doing the meanest offices for each other.

It does not become Christians, Madam, replied he, to explain away the precepts of Christ. The apostasy of our first parents was owing to such a mode of reasoning.

I acknowledge, Sir, said I, that to adhere to the letter of Scripture is a good general rule; but it is not without many exceptions. Transubstantiation is founded on Scripture literally understood, as well as several other errors of the Romish church. Indeed, Mr. —, we ought to take care, that in avoiding one error we do not run into the contrary extreme.

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And pray, Madam, cried he, how do you understand the command of Christ, not to lay up treasure on earth? I doubt not but you can explain it in such a manner as to make it mean the very reverse.

The servants of Jesus, replied I, are taught, that He who clotheth the grass of the field, and feedeth the fowls of the air, will also provide for them. It is their duty therefore to be diligent in business, without being anxiously concerned about making provision, either for a long time to come, or even for the morrow; since an eager solicitude of that kind can be of no advantage, but must rather add a weight to the present evils, which our Lord observes are sufficiently heavy.—To attend more immediately to your question, let me appeal to yourself. Are we not as strongly enjoined to take no thought for the morrow, and to sell that which we have and give alms, as we are not to lay up treasure on earth? Wherefore then do you pay such great regard to the literal sense of this last text of Scripture, when you pay so little to that of

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the two former? In my opinion, it is much more the duty of the opulent to lessen their fortunes in order to alleviate the necessities of the indigent, than it is of a poor man to give away every thing which remains to him out of his daily labour, without making provision for a time of sickness or for old age. Would it not be presumptuous in him to trust to an interposition of providence in his behalf, at the same time that he neglected that duty which he owes to himself? It is as much the duty of one who is rich to be mortified to the world, as it is of one that is poor; and there is as much danger of covetousness and sensuality in the possession of riches, as in the increasing of them.

When the church is in great distress, said he, it certainly becomes us, not only to give away the surplus of our income, but even to sell our possessions, as the first churches did, and to distribute as every one has need.

I agree with you, Sir, replied I; but if the church is not in that distress, it appears to me to be more lawful to increase our substance,

substance, after having dedicated a part of our profits to charitable uses, than it is to spend our whole income upon ourselves, without regarding the necessities of others.—I think, Mr. —, if I mistake not, you have ten children. Several of them you have put apprentices to such businesses as will require a considerable sum to set up in: and Thomas and William will be but poor grocers if they have empty shops. Your daughters too have received a genteel education, which will be a real injury to them if you do not give them fortunes. But I believe, Sir, they have little to fear. That diligence which my friend manifests in his business, not to say that eagerness with which he pursues the world, is a proof to me, that he is but an indifferent convert to his own doctrine. His conduct in this respect is I think a little censurable. Is it right, my dear Sir, to lay a trap for tender consciences, and to neglect that which we enjoin upon others? I beg, Sir, you will tell me ingenuously, whether you are worth no more now than you were five years ago.

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Why, Madam, said he, as my family have increased, I have been obliged to increase my business, and have therefore required a greater capital. But I do not call this laying up treasure on earth; because I can no more carry on my trade without money, than a husbandman can sow his land without seed.

Very true, Sir, replied I; but still you have increased your possessions, which I look upon as an evil, only because my friend allows that in himself which he condemns in others. What is the difference between your extending your trade as your wealth increases, and another person's putting his money out to interest, or placing it in the funds, because he has no opportunity to enlarge his trade? We ought not to keep a bag of deceitful weights, and to use one weight for ourselves and another for our neighbours. You are not the first, Sir, that I have seen, who has denied the lawfulness of laying up treasure on earth, at the same time that he has been unremittingly pursuing the world.—I will readily acknowledge, that the
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love of money is the root of all evil. A covetous Christian sounds no better in my ear than a cheating, lewd, or drunken Christian. The word of God contains many exhortations to be rich in good works, and willing to communicate of our substance to all who are in distress, but especially to our own household, and to those who are of the household of faith. It also contains rules, whereby we may proportion our liberality in common cases, as well as precedents which it may be proper for us to follow. Zaccheus proposed giving the half of his goods, or perhaps of his income, to the poor, and also making a four-fold restitution to those whom he had injured; Jacob dedicated a tenth of his substance to God; and I doubt not but their examples have been imitated by many of the servants of God. One of the rules which the Holy Ghost has prescribed is, that every one should give cheerfully what he has purposed in his own heart. There are times and seasons when Christians enjoy much of the divine presence, and when they

are better disposed than at other times. In those tender and endearing moments, it is natural for them to inquire what they shall render unto the Lord for all his benefits : and what they then resolve to do for Christ in his members, ought from that moment to be sacred, and to be faithfully applied to the intended use.

Another rule is, to lay by in store upon the first day of the week, as God has prospered us ; but the proportion is left, like the free-will offering under the law, to the discretion of the giver, because no particular direction would apply to every case.

I do not think, Sir, continued I, that it is a wise method of enforcing that obedience which every Christian owes to the laws of Christ, to stretch them beyond their true meaning ; since they who attempt to prove too much, frequently prove nothing at all. If the church were in great distress, I acknowledge it would be criminal in us to increase our substance ; but it would be equally criminal not to sell our possessions for the support of our fellow Christians.

Pleading

Pleading the cause of covetousness, Madam, replied he, is pleading the cause of idolatry; for he who could not err has told us, that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. There is a wide difference betwixt retaining what we possess and laying up more. He who desires to be rich is an idolater, because he trusts in Mammon, and is afraid to rely upon God, as appears by his not being contented in his present condition. They who possessed houses or lands, might lawfully forbear to sell them, even when all things were common. Whilst it remained, said Peter to Ananias, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thy own power? You perceive, Madam, there is a great difference between retaining our possessions and increasing them.

Indeed, Sir, answered I, they appear to me to be equally lawful, or equally culpable; since we are as much commanded to sell what we have and give alms, as we are not to lay up treasure on earth. An anxious importunity, either to keep our possessions

sessions or to increase them, is covetousness. It manifests that our minds are more disposed to trust in uncertain riches than in the living God. Moreover, it ought to be remarked, that the young man in the gospel was reprov'd, not for desiring to augment his possessions, but for being unwilling to part with them; on which occasion our Lord observed, that it was *trusting* in riches which made it so difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. If the *possession* of riches unavoidably draw the heart from God, what do you think, Sir, of many of the Old-Testament saints, who had great possessions, which they acquired not merely by the divine permission, but through the divine favour? Would the Most High have given them such abundance, if the gift had been incompatible with retaining the possession of their hearts? I am however ready to acknowledge, that a state of affluence is attended with many temptations; and that the children of God upon whom their Father bestows riches, ought to receive them with fear and trembling,

bling, as well as with thankfulness, since the difficulties to which they are exposed may be compared to a camel's going through the eye of a needle.

We had more conversation on this subject; but it ended as disputes generally do, without change of sentiment on either side. When we have once adopted this or that opinion, we are apt to look upon it with a parental fondness; and our certainty of its truth increases, not as the evidence increases, but in proportion to the warmth with which we have defended it.

I have reason to believe, that Mr. —, upon the whole, is a wise and valuable Christian. If persons of such a character misapprehend the divine oracles, which I cannot doubt with respect to him, how does it become us to implore the divine assistance, and to beseech our heavenly Father to give us large portions of his Spirit, that we may be led into all truth, and cheerfully submit to his guidance in whatever we perceive to be his will!

It would have favoured of ostentation, or I might have told this gentleman, that I have

have long practised myself what he insists upon to be the duty of all. When we had children, my dear husband, who did every thing by rule, appropriated a tenth part of what he gained by trade to charitable uses; and after God, in mercy I trust, took our offspring to himself, he did the same by the whole. His fortune was considerably impaired before his death by many losses; yet he continued to give away the surplus of our income. But he often observed to me, that though he believed this to be his duty in his present circumstances, yet this rule would no more suit every person, than the same coat would fit men of different statures, or one medicine cure every disease.

I know a very worthy man who is a draper. When he married and began business, his wife and he were worth about £. 300. He entered upon a shop belonging to a person who had failed, and took the stock. In order to do this, he borrowed £. 800, which, with the divine blessing upon his industry, he has been enabled to pay, notwithstanding he has had an increasing family.

family. But would it have been agreeable to the spirit of the New Testament, to have told this young couple, upon their beginning the world, that the laws of Christ's kingdom did not permit them to be worth a shilling more than the £. 300 which they set up with? That to attempt it would be idolatry? And that, whatever they might imagine themselves to feel of the divine presence, yet, if they should increase their possessions, they would manifest that they were unbelievers, and that all their religion, and joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, were mere self-deception, and nothing more than a religious path to hell? I think that such an intemperate and ignorant zeal would have gone as far beyond the truth, as, it is to be feared, many professors of the present day fall short of it. Undoubtedly covetousness, or an inordinate desire of the things of time and sense, be they what they may, is an evil as dreadful as it is common. It becomes every servant of Jesus to watch and pray against it; for as the whole body is full of darkness, when the eye is evil or disordered,

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ed, so if a Christian, or one who calls himself a Christian, be covetous, we may depend upon it that he is a fruitless branch in every respect, and nigh unto cursing. Many, it is to be feared, deceive themselves, by thinking what they would do for the poor servants of Jesus, if they were in such or such circumstances; not considering, that God requires us to do our duty in the station wherein he hath placed us, and to be liberal according to what we have, not according to what we have not. * * * * *

THE END.